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Soviet-built U.S. Embassy 'plugged into the Politburo'

✓ By Bill Gertz and John McCaslin
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Sentiment emerged in Congress yesterday for legislation nullifying two construction contracts on the new U.S. Embassy building in Moscow, which one lawmaker called "an eight-story microphone plugged into the Politburo."

The National Security Council, meanwhile, is investigating security procedures at the embassy and other U.S. buildings in Moscow, Attorney General Edwin Meese III said yesterday.

Rep. Dick Armey, Texas Republican, said he will introduce an amendment to the current State Department authorization bill that would void 1969 and 1972 U.S.-Soviet agreements on embassy construction.

"Every reasonable person expects the Soviets to try to spy on the American government," Mr. Armey said. "But he does not expect our own State Department to help them do so."

Mr. Armey accused the Soviets of abusing the bilateral embassy agreements that allowed Moscow to build a new embassy on a commanding site on Wisconsin Avenue NW just above Georgetown.

The location provides Soviet electronic eavesdroppers "line-of-sight views of the Pentagon, the State Department, the White House and the Capitol," he said.

"We gave them a location that's ideal for spying," Mr. Armey said. "Then we let Russian construction workers build our embassy there [in Moscow], according to plans approved by Soviet architects."

The new embassy under construction in Moscow, Mr. Armey said, contains listening devices "in floor boards, in ceiling tiles, in the walls and in prefabricated concrete."

The new building's steel infrastructure has been soldered together to aid in transmitting signals from the implanted listening devices, he said.

"Essentially, our new embassy is now an eight-story microphone plugged into the Politburo," Mr. Armey said, referring to the ruling Soviet administrative body.

Mr. Armey said Soviet actions have "violated the spirit in which they [the agreements] were negotiated. . . . This gives us clear grounds to scrap the current agreement and negotiate a new one."

Noting that "it took two or three wayward Marines to get people's attention," Mr. Armey said he expects his legislation to receive bipartisan support. Two Marine embassy guards have been brought home on suspicion of allowing spies to enter the Moscow embassy, and a third Marine is suspected of violating rules against socializing with Soviet women.

A former administration official said President Reagan inherited the embassy problems from previous administrations and met widespread bureaucratic resistance to counterespionage reforms.

"The fact remains, our government doesn't take counterintelligence all that serious," the former official said. Many officials, particularly in the State Department, regard anti-spy efforts as "institutional McCarthyism."

Mr. Meese, who participates in National Security Council sessions, said at a press conference yesterday that the majority of NSC members "are very concerned about what we've learned so far" regarding security breaches at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow.

The attorney general said he expressed his concern about the security breakdown to former Defense Secretary James Schlesinger, who has been placed in charge of a State Department investigation into security arrangements at the new embassy building.

"I think that a number of precautions need to be taken which would tighten up on the security of the Moscow embassy, and perhaps they're applicable to other embassies," Mr. Meese said.

Mr. Meese told reporters that new security regulations and "new types of physical structures" may be required to protect U.S. officials from Soviet eavesdropping devices.

But Mr. Meese stopped short of agreeing with some security experts who have argued that the current embassy building can never be secure again.

"I'm not sure that if you tore it down and started all over, you would get any safer an embassy that would not be penetrable in some way," he said.

"But I think whatever — whether the present structure is to be used, or if a different structure is to be used, there needs to be the careful application of the latest [security] technology, perhaps separate from the structure itself, to make sure classified conversations can be held."

In Moscow, two touring House members, Reps. Dan Mica, Florida Democrat, and Olympia Snowe, Maine Republican, visited the embassy and found security "fully compromised" by the spy scandal, according to Mr. Mica.